

# V&A Archive Research Guide

Loan collections and special loan exhibitions at  
the V&A

A large, stylized logo consisting of the letters 'V', '&', and 'A' in a teal color. The 'V' is a simple, bold shape. The '&' is a decorative, calligraphic symbol. The 'A' is a tall, narrow, pointed shape with a small serif at the top.

From the beginning the Museum supplemented its own relatively modest collections with loans of objects from institutions and private owners, particularly from members of the British Royal Family. As the Annual Report of 1863 stated, 'the reception of objects on loan has long been a recognized action, from the first year of the establishment of the Department'.

There was also the prospect that these loan objects might be converted to gifts or bequests at a future date, as was the case with the collections of George Salting (archive ref. MA/1/S293), Lady Charlotte Schreiber (MA/1/S793), David M. Currie (MA/1/C3543/1-2) and J. H. Fitzhenry (MA/1/F677/1-22). This outcome, however, was not always achieved: J. Pierpont Morgan (MA/1/M2725/1-14) began to withdraw his loans in 1911 transferring them to New York in order to avoid heavy death duties.

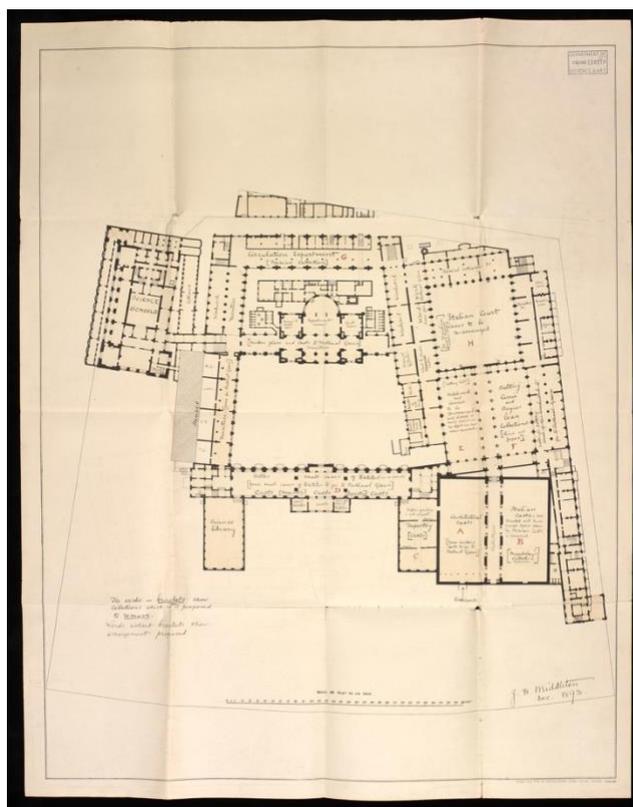
## Principal archival sources for researching loan collections

The records of the V&A Archive are a rich resource for the study of the history of the Museum's loan collections and exhibitions and are available for study in the Blythe House Reading Room. Series of particular relevance are:

- Nominal files, 1863–1999  
[MA/1](#)
- Art Referees' reports, 1863–86  
[MA/3](#)
- Registers of loans in, 1860–1939  
[MA/31](#)
- Press cuttings, 1831–1955  
[MA/49](#)

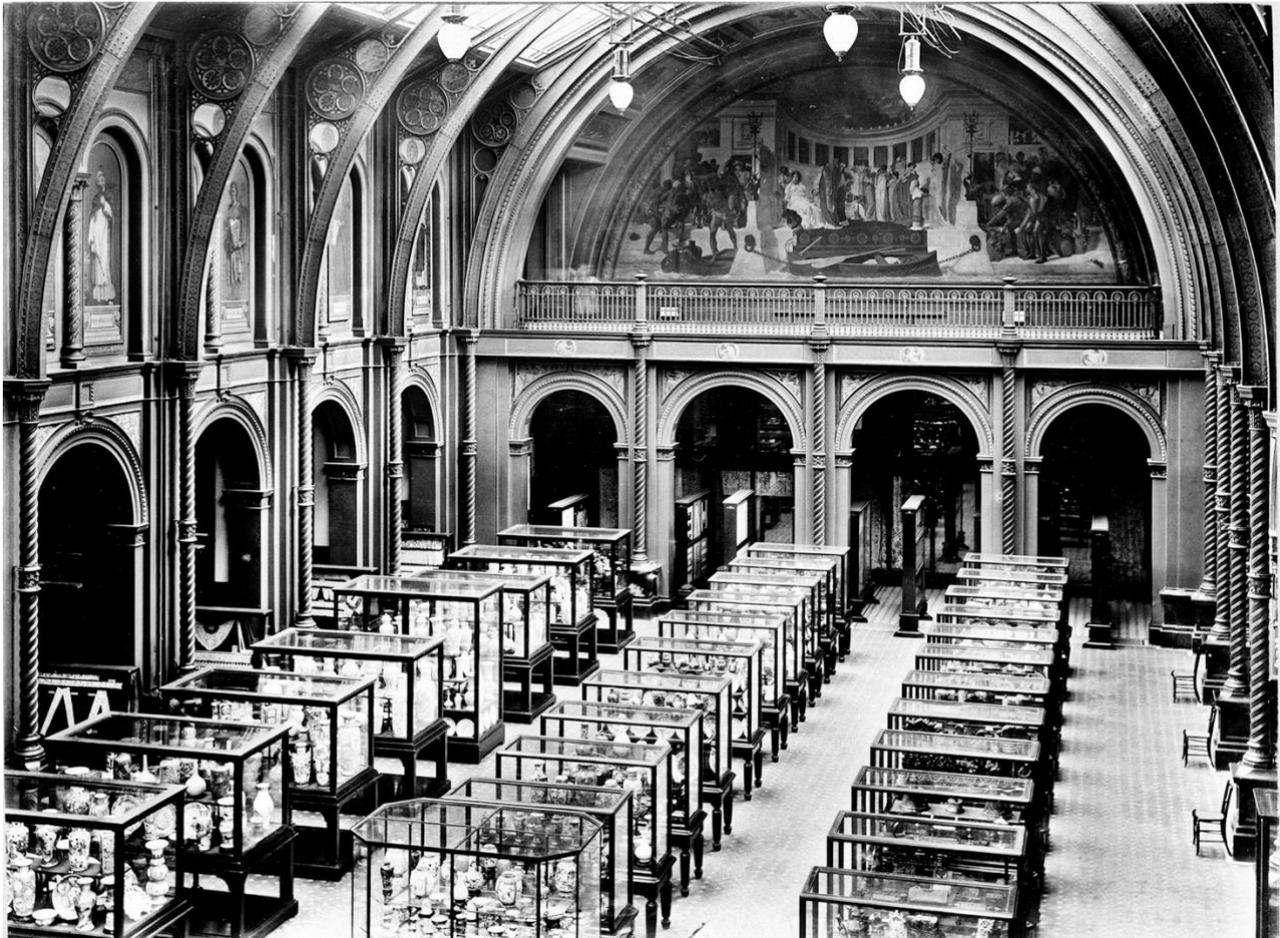
ED 84: Policy and administrative records, 1844–1958

- Précis of the Board Minutes of the Science and Art Department, 1852–93  
[ED 84/35-41](#)
- Minutes, etc., concerning the Art Museum Exhibition, 1862, comprising copy minutes and letters, printed circulars, lists of committee members, lenders and objects, relating to the special exhibition of works of art of the Mediaeval, Renaissance and more recent epochs on loan in 1862  
[ED 84/41](#)
- Re-arrangement and development of Museum collections, 1909–13  
[ED 84/155](#)
- Loans to the museum, 1870–1937  
[ED 84/414](#)
- Annual Reports of Science and Art Department, 1854–99



## The display of loans

In his 1859 report on the art collections, J. C. Robinson, Superintendent of the Art Collections at the South Kensington Museum, observed that 'the nature and extent of the space given to his great national collection is entirely inadequate to its proper display and presentation' (Seventh Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee on Education. London: Printed by George E. Eyre and William Spottiswood for HMSO, 1860). The situation had been improved lately by the allocation of additional rooms beneath the new Turner galleries, two of which were dedicated to the exhibition of works on loan which had previously been on display in the temporary iron building.



From 1862, loan objects were displayed in a dedicated gallery – the South Court – which fulfilled this function for forty-five years; the gallery was inaugurated with the ambiguously named Loan Exhibition. The Octagon (Loan) Court (Gallery 40) – part of the new Aston Webb building which opened in 1910 – succeeded the South Court as the main venue for the display of loans.

By 1924, the growth of the Museum's collections was such that the merits of reserving an area as large as the Octagon Court for temporary loans was questioned (archive ref. [MA/47/1/1](#)). It was not until 1933, however, that the 'Moot of Senior Officers' decided to assign the space to the Furniture Department and loans were no longer displayed together but absorbed within the appropriate departmental permanent exhibits ([MA/47/1/2](#)); this decision was subsequently presented to the Advisory Council for further consideration at its 25 January 1934 meeting ([MA/49/1/3](#)).



## Royal loans

From Queen Victoria onwards, a succession of members of the Royal Family have loaned objects (often in large numbers) to the Museum. In 1853 Queen Victoria lent the Museum collections of decorative furniture and Sevres, Oriental and German porcelain (archive ref. [MA/31/2](#)); however, the most outstanding of the Royal loans are the Raphael Cartoons, which have been on loan since 1865 ([MA/2/R1/1-7](#), [MA/2/R2](#), and [MA/31/2](#)). The correspondence files for Royalty (nominal files MA/1/R1939 to MA/1/R1960) document the various loans that have been made over the years, as do the loans registers ([MA/31](#)), and lists of loans to the Museum from the Crown (A0198). The Royal Family also loaned objects for one-off exhibitions, such as the exhibition of wedding presents accepted by the Prince and Princess of Wales, 15 April - 4 May 1863. This exhibition occupied the new North Court and ran for 17 days, attracting 229,425 visitors. Relevant archive files include:

- NF Royalty: Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (includes correspondence with lender, list of objects, attendance figures)  
[MA/1/R1940](#)
- Photographic guardbook, negative GD2966  
[MA/32/544](#)
- Press cuttings  
[MA/49/2/8-9](#)
- Eleventh Report of the Science and Art Department. London: Printed by George E. Eyre and William Spottiswood for HMSO, 1864

## 19th-century special loan exhibitions

Organised by J. C. Robinson, the Special Exhibition of Works of Art on loan of the Medieval, Renaissance, and more recent epochs of 1862 was intended to counterbalance the displays of contemporary manufactures at the London International Exhibition. Between 9,000 and 10,000 Medieval and Renaissance objects on loan from 553 persons were exhibited. The exhibition attracted almost 900,000 visitors. Many of the objects included in this display remained on loan for the greater part of 1863 and it was suggested in press coverage that some of the loans should be acquired for the national collection. *The Illustrated London News* profiled the loan collections in its 21 June 1862 and 17 January 1863 issues.

The V&A Archive holds some records that document this landmark exhibition:

- [Precis of the Board minutes of the Science and Art Department. Vol. I, 1852–63](#)  
[ED 84/35](#)
- [Minutes, etc., concerning the Art Museum Exhibition, 1862](#)  
[ED 84/41](#)
- [Art loan exhibition, 1862](#)  
[MA/28/1](#)
- [Art referees' reports, 1863–64](#)  
[MA/3/2-4](#)
- [Photographic guardbooks - 340 photographs, mainly object photographs some of which are sculptures \(negative numbers 2875–3214\)](#)  
[MA/32/14-16](#)
- [Press cuttings, 1862–63](#)  
[MA/49/2/7-8](#)
- [Catalogue of Special exhibition of works of art of the mediaeval, Renaissance, & more recent periods, Jun - Nov? 1862](#)  
[A0581](#)
- [Tenth Report of the Science and Art Department. London: Printed by George E. Eyre and William Spottiswood for HMSO, 1863](#)

Following the success of this exhibition, further loan exhibitions of a smaller and more specialist nature were organised. These included:

- [The special exhibition of portrait miniatures on loan, 5 June – 31 October 1865](#)  
[MA/28/2](#)
- [The first special exhibition of national portraits, 16 April – 18 August 1866](#)  
[MA/28/3](#)
- [The second special exhibition of national portraits, 2 May – 31 August 1867](#)  
[MA/28/3](#), [MA/49/1/37](#), [MA/32/17-24](#)

- The third exhibition of national portraits, 13 April – 22 August 1868  
MA/49/1/37
- The loan exhibition of ancient & modern jewellery & personal ornament, June – July 1872  
A0150/35
- The special loan exhibition of decorative art needlework made before 1800, May - August? 1873  
MA/28/5
- The special loan exhibition of enamels on metal, June - September 1874  
MA/28/6
- The special loan exhibition of Spanish & Portuguese ornamental art, June - September 1881  
MA/35/71

## Special loan collections

Occasionally the South Kensington Museum exhibited loans that might not be expected to fall within its collections policy. One such exhibition was Heinrich Schliemann's Troy Collection, which was displayed in 1877:

- Register of loans in, 1878–1937  
MA/31/7
- Registers of abstracts of correspondence, 1874–83  
MA/4/37-38
- Press cuttings, 1877  
MA/49/2/49

Another was the Colonel Lane Fox's anthropological collection, which he lent to the Bethnal Green Museum in 1874.

## Further reading

- James, Elizabeth. *The Victoria & Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998
- Eatwell, Ann. 'Borrowing from Collectors: The role of the Loan of the Formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and its Collection (1852-1932)'. *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 20 (2000): 21-28
- Eatwell, Ann. 'The Collector's or Fine Arts Club 1857-1874. The first society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts'. *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 18 (1994): 25-30
- Physick, John. *The Victoria and Albert Museum: the history of its building*. London: [The Museum], 1982

These works are available for consultation in the Blythe House Reading Room.

## Search

[Search the V&A Archive](#)

## Access

The V&A Archive is located at Blythe House, near Olympia in West London and can be consulted by appointment only.

[Find out how to access the V&A Archive](#)

## Contact

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Images:

Ground plan, showing the location of the Salting, Currie and Bayes loan collections, 1893. V&A Archive, ED 84/154. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Photograph, South Kensington Museum, South Court, about 1886. Museum no. E.1103-1989. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Octagon Court, 1920. V&A Archive, MA/32/410, negative 49410. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London